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SIPDIS

LONDON FOR PETER LORD AND AMBASSADOR SANDERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR GON LEADER AFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR BINATIONAL
COMMISSION

REF: STATE 100144

Classified By: CDA Dundas McCullough, reason para 1.5 b.

¶1. (C) On September 28, Ambassador called on Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Alhaji Mahmud Yayale Ahmed to review bilateral issues. DCM accompanied.

¶2. (C) Ambassador thanked Ahmed for his assistance during the Secretary's successful visit in August, and underscored the importance of both sides' identifying promptly thematic objectives for the Binational Commission agreed to by the U.S. and Nigeria. Referring to the Nigerian MFA, she stressed the importance of not letting poor bureaucratic staff work derail the commission and of moving expeditiously to launch the commission by the end of the year. Good governance, electoral reform, corruption, the Niger Delta, and trade and investment were all obvious areas of bilateral interest.

¶3. (C) Ahmed agreed that the GON should be responsive in advancing its agenda views on the Binational Commission and that MFA might not be the best GON lead for the initiative. He stated that President Yar'Adua had endorsed the Binational Commission proposal, even though he had concerns about the structural concept based on the poor performance of Nigeria's bilateral commissions with Sudan and other countries. He reiterated the supreme importance for Nigeria of the U.S. relationship, and the value of addressing in partnership the areas of interest cited by the Ambassador. Nodding in agreement on the centrality of corruption, he remarked that embattled former Delta State governor Ibori is "an insult to every Nigerian."

¶4. (C) Turning to electoral reform, Ahmed said that Yar'Adua is committed to replacing INEC's leadership with people of "impeccable character," but that he would be hard pressed politically to terminate INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu; instead, Iwu would likely be allowed to serve until his term expires in June 2010. (Note: Foreign Minister Madeukwe recently made the same point to A/S Carson-reftel.) Ahmed suggested that USG technical advice would be particularly welcome for structuring the financial independence of INEC and strengthening its voter registration procedures.

¶5. (C) Comment: Although it was the Foreign Minister who originally proposed the Binational Commission, his ministry lacks the capacity and in some quarters the will to do the work to make the commission a success. SGF Ahmed would be the ideal GON lead: he is straightforward, willing, able, and (unlike the Foreign Minister) has access and influence with President Yar'Adua. Ahmed noted that he has received permission to travel for consultations in Washington at the end of October, which would be an excellent opportunity for us to lay down key markers for Yar'Adua and to bolster the prospects for a successful Binational Commission.

